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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSOR'S PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN PSYCHOLOGY

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*"Past experiences are not buried as if they were archaeological treasures, but the past is rather recreated as it is said. Through this narrative dialogue between reflection and interpretation, the experience becomes pedagogic Knowledge about the contents"*

*Sigrun Gudmundsdottir, 1998,p.60*

## Summary

This work belongs to the Project "Teaching and learning Psychology: a study of the educational practice in professors and beginners". It is part of an investigation program developed in the context of the subject "Didactic and Practical Planning of Psychology teaching" in which we have been working since 1998. This subject is also considered as the final stage of the formative itinerary for Psychology s professors.

The reached results show the incidence that the beliefs and professors' representations have in the teaching processes.

By getting into the studies centered in the educational knowledge we guide the inquiry around the development of the professor's professional knowledge and particularly the development of their formation.

Our proposal contemplates a formation device which incorporates the observation, reflection, evaluation and self-evaluation of the practice in order to facilitate the reconstruction, significance and re-significance of the teaching and learning processes by giving relevance to the development of the teacher professional knowledge.

The analysis of teaching practices process reveals that the mediations that cross the knowledge in the being taught instances are constituted in reflections axes. This involves the future professor's relationship with the knowledge and their projection in the construction of the professional identity.

**Key words:** teaching of Psychology; formation device; reflection; professional knowledge.

## Introduction

The pedagogic proposal of the class "Practices and Didactical Planning of Psychology Teaching" incorporates a formation device that allows to promote and to approach to the construction of the professor's professional knowledge in Psychology.

"Teaching practices" imply the configuration of a particular relationship among the educational former and the practitioner student that propitiates the interrogation about the singularity in which are registered the teaching and learning processes. The

development of the professor's professional knowledge supposes a construction process and a reconstruction of meanings on the pedagogic relationship into an institutional and social context.

The activity assumed by the educational former called supervision, would not be understood as control, but "accompaniment" to guide the professional development from a collaborative perspective, where the recognition and enrichment commit and even impact in the fellows implied in the formative process, that is: student practitioner, educational former and courses professors.

The construction of knowledge is a process shared by the teacher and the student as long as at the teaching act the teacher also learns from the student. (...) "This process is characterized by the same interaction elements among object and subject and not only for association processes. This way, the professor and also the student with the scholar knowledge, don't copy the information of the reality but rather carry out a progressive and internal process by means of successive accommodations, assimilations and equilibrations." (Carretero, 1998, p.13).

From this perspective we understand that as well as the students possess previous ideas, next to the daily knowledge than to the academic one which appeared in the moment of learning, the teachers have some beliefs that impregnate their practices without premeditation.

The professional practice supposes the responsible and autonomous use in context of the acquired knowledge in the formative itinerary and it requires the development of a complex thought.

From the Chair we have tried to favor the critical and reflexive formation by creating devices that promote and propitiate learning by reflection.

## **Development**

### *The professor's professional knowledge*

The professor's professional knowledge is a category that refers to the theoretical and practical knowledge of the teacher. It would be more or less a complex system that considers in its constitution knowledge, beliefs, dexterities, abilities and capacities. Teacher reflection about what the student should learn and how he/she will learn, motivates the interaction between his/her beliefs and knowledge and the contextual conditions, configuring and guiding his/her actions (Zamudio, 2003).

Taking the professional process of being a teacher as a formation process it is understood that personality changing and the way of being in the profession are based on the sense-meaning that could be given to the educational work.

The practical knowledge structures the process and it involves three aspects: 1) the knowledge about and for the teaching; 2) the interactive articulation with the school as a context work and educational production; and 3) the personalities and the way of being in the profession that transform it in competent and committed professional or may be not (Barboza Abdala, 2004).

The acquired experience during the own school history is the base of the epistemological conceptions sustained by the professors. At the same time these conceptions are the “matter prevails” and the most outstanding obstacle in the construction of a significant professional knowledge (Porlán Ariza, Rivero García & Martín del Pozo, 1998).

From a constructive perspective the changes in personal epistemology and in the professor practice imply conceptual, methodological and attitudinal ruptures that facilitate a restructuring of their thought. Furió and Carnicer (2002) sustain that these changes are possible starting from new formation models based on the teaching-learning as guided investigation. This activity must consider the ideas, interests and the professors’ formative necessities. Following this logic is necessary to impel the theoretical- practical integration meanwhile the innovation and didactic investigation are propitiated.

The knowledge of the subject supposes dimensions that influence in the teaching and learning of future professors’, that is: the knowledge of the content (objective information, organization of principles and central concepts); the central knowledge (knowledge of the relevant structures, of the paradigms that guide the inquiry focus in a discipline), the syntactic knowledge (knowledge of the syntactic structures of a discipline and that they consist of inquiry instruments, evidence canons and tests that admit the new knowledge in certain field) and the beliefs about the subject (Grossman, Wilson & Shulman, 2005).

It has been demonstrated that one of the main challenges that the novice professors face has to do with the transformation of the knowledge to discipline in an appropriate knowledge for the teaching. More than knowing the central structures and syntactic knowledge of the discipline, it also requires the knowledge about the apprentices and their learning, of the curriculum, of the context, of the specific didactic action of the subject (Grossman and col., 2005).

Shulman (1987) shared the following concept “pedagogic knowledge about the contents” which designates the teacher modalities to know and to understand the subject; it is the specific knowledge of the teaching. For the author, this concept is an interpretive and reflexive activity that allows the teachers giving to the knowledge and to the texts a sort of life.

### *The development of the professional knowledge*

The professional development supposes a learning process focuses in the reflection that facilitates the exploration and revision of experiences and knowledge promoting a new understanding that is translated in action. Järvinen (1998) agrees with the reflexive nature of the practice keeping in mind the affective aspects involved. The author proposed the development of tools that facilitate the reflection about the ways of perceiving, communicating, thinking and acting.

Without premeditation teachers possess some beliefs that are showed in their practices. Some knowledge is built in the process of professional development. Clandinin and Connelly define the knowledge like a “body of convictions and of conscious or unconscious meanings that have arisen of the intimate, social or traditional experience and that are expressed in the actions of a person.” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1988, p.41).

When teaching the teacher puts in act his own underlying epistemology as a product of a collective school biography. That knowledge appears when different knowledge is valued, contents are selected and activities are designed, formulated and evaluated.

The development of professors professional knowledge supposes the transformation of different kind of knowledge that the fellow has acquired from his experience related to the world and also in his academic formation. That transformation process happens in the practice. That is why the result of the study of the professor development of the professional knowledge includes the previous instance of exercising the profession, that is to say its performance like practitioner.

We follow Schön (1992), who considers the reflexive practitioner's figure granting special relevance to the process of critical revision of his thoughts and actions like a way to improve his praxis.

Considering the point of view of Järvinen (1998) we understand that the development processes that take place during the practices point to achieve the future professors to be able to carry out a reflexive professional practice, being able to meditate critically on their perception, thought and action, as well as on the context in which their practice develops in order to promote changes.

A formative proposal whose objective is the consciousness of the future teachers regarding the institutional and social conditions of the teaching requires a commitment that includes the complexity of the educational practice. Arnaus points out that “to develop the understanding and reflection on the institutions and educational processes and to promote a critical attitude of them it is necessary to think about the vision of the knowledge that will be transmitted. One knowledge perspective or another will lead us

to choose some certain relationships in the classroom, some learning tasks and not other and some coherent evaluation processes". (Arnaus, 1999, p.610).

It is essential then to benefit a problematic and critic perspective of knowledge.

We need to value the capacity to investigate and to interpret the reality, as well as to consider the plurality and provisional characteristics of knowledge.

The formation ask the pedagogic knowledge with the purpose of endowing it of a personal meaning that avoids their reproduction and favor their significance and new significance, starting from the reflection on the theoretical-practical relationship in the formative context.

The theoretical and practical articulation not only searches the understanding but the taking of conscience of the real conditions and the contexts that will facilitate the action for changes. Following Elliot (1990) the reflexive practice is a dialectical process of practice creation from theory and theory from practice.

Approaching the complexity that implies the practices Schön points out that it is necessary to go ahead with the mechanical application of the theory.

Recognition and evaluation of the situation is required to elaborate a singular answer from the professional knowledge. The uncertainty of the practice configuration demands the landslide of positions framed in the technical rationality.

For their singularity the teaching practices demand the construction of actions, the reflection on those actions and the arisen knowledge of that reflection. The development of these dimensions facilitates the construction of the professional knowledge.

As a tool for the professor's formation the reflection is relevant taking into account the arisen results of the application of formative focuses that dissociate or fracture the (theoretical and practical) knowledge appropriation processes.

The reflection activity in formation contexts favors a deep understanding. Although it doesn't guarantee a better practice; so that this process appears in the professor's performance it is necessary the deliberative instance that conjugates intuition and reason. The intuitive thought is based on tacit knowledge as long as the analytic thought settles in more explicit knowledge. Both thought forms occur in the educational practice in a combined or independent way. In some circumstances the professor finds it difficult to express in verbal and rational form what happens in the classroom. This is the moment when the metaphoric expression and images are alternative commendable and effective to show the facts.

In this process it is possible to identify different objects and reflection levels: - the professor's professional personality, - educational situation, - curriculum and curricular content, - educational institution.

For the reflection levels the following terms are proposed: - technical competition (the focus of interest centered in the achievement of the appropriate domain and effective application of the educational knowledge), - tools for a reflexive practice (the experiences are described considering their nature and logic), - critic conscience (the moral and ethical underlined approaches are analyzed to the practical action).

The particularity of the discipline knowledge in the development of the professional knowledge

In the particular case of psychology professors it is necessary to consider the development of the psychological discipline as a corpus of scientific knowledge.

The Psychology history implies the constitution of different theories concepts and categories which try to capture what we conceptually know as subjectivity.

The Psychology teaching requires the reflection on its study object considering its particularity (an unsubstantial object) as well as the historical and epistemological context.

The psychological knowledge is also characterized by generating different effects in those that learn it since it is a knowledge on oneself. At the same time this particularity awakes the desire but also the fear. The teacher who carries the knowledge usually motivates bound representations to the diagnostic aspect that is related with the psychological knowledge. The examples used to work the contents should be appropriately selected since they are part of the daily experience.

Considering what was said about the discipline knowledge it becomes necessary the reflection about their particularities in order to identify the aspects that facilitate or block the teaching and learning processes.

### **Methodology's formation**

The study which is developed in the mark of the implementation of our proposal formation responds to a qualitative perspective. The ethnographical focus is relevant as long as actions and speeches of the practice are rescued. Then the access to the significance structures that give them sense is propitiated.

The formation device includes: writing and reflection on the school biography; class observations, narrative registration and analysis; planning and development of the classes; reflection and reconstruction of the own practices by way of self evaluation.

The narrative facilitates the elaboration of meanings that are useful to generate a reconstruction process, significance and new significance of the own practice. The presentation and narrated representation of the own experience allows to take distance to assume a more critical position and to reconstruct the way of acting and being in the classroom.

The proposal of the class of teaching practices promotes the passage from the teaching group to the formation group; in this process three instances are recognized at least in those that the group device settles facilitating interaction, dialogue and inter-subjectivity.

In each one of those instances the theoretical knowledge is focused as an object that generates the reflection from the dialogue.

In a first moment (theoretical and/or practical classes) it is the educational former who offers the experience so that the students, future practitioners, could reflect from the scientific knowledge (pedagogic and psychological knowledge in this case) being able to go into the theoretical - practical relationship.

In a second moment (practical classes and/or supervision space) the practitioners contribute with their experiences (their observation registers or their own teaching practice) with the intention of thinking of the group or the relationship with the supervisor. In this case the consciousness process will allow the theoretical and practical articulation in order to interpret and to modify the own actions immediately (the process of practical teaching and in the future their professional practice).

The practitioners use a series of instances and instruments involved in the formation device and facilitate the development of their professional knowledge from the teaching practices.

The implementation of the referred formation device, supposes a supervision model that overcomes the conceptions that link this activity to the control (supervision like inspection) and/or to the transfer of abilities, dexterities, methods, technical, etc. (supervision like technology). We agree with the models that facilitate to make trouble ("problematization") around the same supervision activity.

That is how we understand the perspective of the clinical supervision, which doesn't associate the supervision activity to the superior hierarchical status and the imposition of approaches and interpretations but rather it is presented as a process in which the rules, relationships and tasks are self-built in the support interrelation and professional development of the educational former and of the practitioners in formation (Angulo F., 1999)

## **Conclusions**

*"We discover that professors are unable to tell us immediately about the mental processes that are taking place when they have to make some decisions in the classroom" (Brown and Mc Intyre, 1993).*



From a group of competences that appear in the activity of the classroom we identify as outstanding abilities that the practitioner could recognize the context, interpret the situation and carry out the necessary adjustments in the mark of the didactic intervention.

Through the studies that we have been developing we can appreciate the relevance of the theoretical-practical relationship in the exercise of the psychology professor's profession, in which the scientific disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge is conjugated and the intuitive thought, being crucial the instance in which each one intervenes.

Our works reaffirm the same ideas sustained by diverse authors: Atkinson (2000), Elliot and Calderhead (1993), Eraut (1994), Greenfield (1997) regarding the effect that in the formative contexts reveals the existence of theoretical knowledge in some circumstances associated to the practice. We believe that the educational former should be located in the level of the student's practitioner experience, propitiating the work on the own practice. This kind of practice facilitates to understand the decisions and strategies that are finally used by the light of the experience that produced them.

The teaching practices conform a landmark in the construction of the professor's professional knowledge in psychology. The implementation of the formation device that we present allows an analysis of that process focused in the characteristics that the reflection-action assumes. This process is based on different instances and the application of instruments that conforms the curricular proposal.

The investigations that we have been carrying out around the teaching and learning of Psychology in formation context have facilitated to figure out the complexity that assumes the psychological knowledge when transforming it in knowledge to teach.

In the formation itinerary it is possible to observe the development of the professional thought by the narratives taken place to the moment of the self-evaluation practices. Discursive expressions are plentiful, some of them with metaphoric character that illustrate the process of teaching and learning Psychology.

The images make possible to pick up the flow experiential in a spontaneous way without demands of articulation in the different ways of knowledge. Clandinin (1986) suggests the image like resource to understand the base on which the process of taking intuitive decisions is sustained. This appears clearly in complex situations in which thought become difficult to be expressed. A practitioner refers: "it is not easy to come off the own knowledge about psychology... ", another student adds: "It was difficult for me to find the balance...", a third outlines: "magic recipes don't exist."

The analysis of twenty self-evaluations has facilitated the visualization of objects and reflection levels. In most of the cases the reflections are centered in the curricular content (grade of abstraction and complexity of the psychological knowledge); a small

number of students meditate around the technical ability with allusions to the didactic conversion and their effects in the development of the classes. The critical reflection regarding the own practices appears in very few cases as long as a high subjective implication is required.

These results can be explained taking in account the development of the professional knowledge starting from the formative proposal. During teaching activities the identification, “problematization” and “thematization” of obstacles and conflicts show the practitioner’s possibility to perceive, to think and to promote changes starting from their actions.

The practices raise reflections and actions that evidence consciousness about the discipline to teach and the way of doing it through procedures, activities and contexts.

Considering that the reflection process is energized in order to allow the practitioner to learn of its own experience and knowledge, it becomes necessary to appreciate the value of the relationship that is configured between the educational former and the student practitioner in the development of the professor’s professional knowledge.

Thinking about the formative process opens the road toward the development of the professional knowledge and not only for the fellows in formation but also in the formers. If the inter-subjectivity remits to the dialogical relationship that allows being conscious of what a person is through and what the other one returns him. At the end of the formative itinerary the references of the students practitioners renovate the relationship built in the process, facilitating in the “writing and reading reflections” the transformation of the practices even of the own formers.

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